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Wide, Wide World of Books

Nixon, the Hiss Case and a Presidential Campaign

Richard M. Nixon's new book, *Six Crises (Doubleday; 460 pages; $5.95),* resembles its author on the stump almost too closely. It has the free-wheeling frankness, knack for innuendo, and attraction to controversy of a Nixon campaign.

The book had hardly reached the book stores, in fact, before a full-fledged tempest was raging: Is Nixon right when he charges that Kennedy made his campaign proposal for sterner anti-Castro measures with full knowledge of Central Intelligence Agency invasion plans? No one yet knows, but there is surely more such controversy to come.

Despite its stated subject matter, *Six Crises* is preeminently a book about Nixon the man—and few subjects are more provocative, to Republicans and Democrats alike.

Nixon has tried hard to avoid this. His account of the major crises in his life (the Hiss case, the attack on his private "fund" during the 1952 campaign, Eisenhower's heart attack in 1955, the anti-Nixon riots in Caracas in 1958, the encounter with Khrushchev in 1959, and the 1960 campaign) is knitted together by a running analysis of "crisis" and what it does to a man.

The View From the Top

In his foreward he declares that this is his major concern: "Since we live in an age in which individual reaction to crisis may bear on the fate of mankind for centuries to come, we must spare no effort to learn all we can and thus sharpen our responses. If the record of one man's experience in meeting crises . . . can help . . . then this book may serve a useful purpose."

Needless to say, though, few will read *Six Crises* for this purpose. It will be read, as Nixon knows full well, because people want the "inside" story behind Hiss, Caracas, and the rest, plus a few political fireworks.

They will not be disappointed in either case. Harry Truman, Nelson Rockefeller, JFK, Lyndon Johnson, the press, the doctrinaire liberals, and radical right—all come in for a nudge in some case, an elbow in others.

Nixon's comments about the Quemoy-Matsu issue that arose during his second TV debate with Kennedy may goad the Democrats as much as his more publicized remarks about Cuba. According to Nixon, Chester Bowles contacted his close friend, Fred Seaton, while the argument over whether to defend the islands was raging, and suggested that the matter be dropped in the interests of national security.

"I aksed Seaton what he thought the real purpose of this message might be," Nixon writes. "His reaction was that Bowles and Kennedy—if Kennedy was aware of what Bowles had done—were using this device for the purpose of getting me to lay off on an issue that was becoming increasingly unpopular for Kennedy." Nixon takes no position on this assumption, but he does let it see the light of day.

F. Clyde Wilkinson

RICHARD M. NIXON: He analyzes the six top crises in his career.

Of the six chapters, it is the Hiss case and the 1960 campaign which make the best reading. Hiss and Chambers have now receded so far in public memory that their story has a freshness about it missing in the other episodes. Moreover, it reads like Perry Mason: Hiss, the villain, backed by friends in high places and the press; Chambers, the hero, greasy and unimpressive at first; Nixon, the investigator, determined to press on despite the objections of his colleagues.

Slowly, of course, the evidence mounts up and Hiss loses his composure. It is touch and go all the way, though, and the outcome is in doubt to the very end. Indeed, it is still questioned by some.

Inside the Nixon Camp

Nixon on the 1960 campaign has another appeal entirely. Here we know all too well what happened; we also know, thanks to Theodore White's *The Making of the President, 1960,* what went on inside the Kennedy camp, both in terms of strategy and drama.

The Nixon camp was more secretive, however, and much of what he tells us now is news: That Lodge promised to put a Negro in the cabinet because he believed Nixon would name Ralph Bunche [illegible] and with good reason, that Nixon tried unsuccessfully to get the White House to make a statement promising Justice Department aid when Martin Luther King was jailed; that he seriously considered a last-minute attack on the way Kennedy's associates had "milked" the religious issue; that the Republican poll-watchers in downstate Illinois misinterpreted his early-morning TV talk to the nation as a concession and went home, thus contributing to a narrow 8,000-vote loss in a key state.

What kind of self-portrait emerges from *Six Crises?* A curious mixture of shrewdness and naivete.

When it comes to purely political decisions, Nixon is careful in the extreme. This shows up not only in the way he makes them (after lengthy, painstaking consultations with advisers, many of which are recorded in the book), but in his general conclusions about the "nature" of crisis: "Confidence in crisis," he says, "depends in great part on adequacy of preparation—where preparation is possible." It is an oft-repeated theme.

He is not so careful about the niceties of personal exposure or self-advertisement, as he showed in his embarrassing defense of "good language" during the third television debate with Kennedy. He hangs his methods and his motives out on the line for all to see here; he is not at all loath in quoting praise for himself. His enemies will use much of this against him.

Six Crises is not a book that will endure no matter what happens to the reputation of its author—as Churchill's memoirs on World War II certainly will and Kennedy's *Profiles in Courage* may.

Taken in doses it is eminently readable, despite its length. But it has neither the distinction of nor the inherent importance necessary to survive a November defeat in California: Seen from the vantage point of history, for example, Caracas, Hiss, and the kitchen debate with Khrushchev may well be no more than footnotes.

For now, though, it offers valuable insight on the mind of a tough and able public servant, one who is still very much a part of the nation's future.

—DOUGLAS M. DAVIS